



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ

When faced with darkness

Monday, 3 February 2014

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 6, 7 February 2014)

In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis revived the testimony of King David, “a saint and a sinner” in his “dark moment” of fleeing Jerusalem after his son Absalom betrayed him. Then at the end of the Mass, on the liturgical feast day of St Blaise, two priests gave to the Pope, and then to all those present, the traditional blessing of placing two candles on the throat in the form of a cross.

In his reflection, the Pope made reference to the first Reading from the Second Book of Samuel (15:13-14,30; 16:5-13). “We have heard”, said the Holy Father, “the story of that very sad time for David, when he was forced to flee because his son had betrayed him”. David’s speaks eloquently about his son Absalom. “A great betrayal” is put before us and even the majority of the people side “with the son and against the king”. Indeed, we read in the Scriptures that: “The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom”. David feels “as if this child was dead”.

What does David do when faced with his son’s betrayal? The Holy Father indicated his “three attitudes”. Firstly, he explained, “David, a man of government, takes the situation as it is. He knows that this war will be very hard, he knows that many people will die”, because “the people are divided against each other”. And realistically he makes “the choice not to kill his people”. Certainly he could “fight in Jerusalem against the forces of his son. But he said: No, I do not want Jerusalem to be destroyed!”. He also opposed those who wanted to take away the Ark, ordering

them to leave it in its place: “The ark of God remains in the city!”. All of this shows David’s “first attitude”, which was “to defend himself; he uses neither God nor his people”, because he has a “great love” for both.

“In the difficult moments of life”, the Pope said, “it may happen that, perhaps in desperation, one tries to defend himself however he can”, even “using God and people”. David instead shows us, in his “first attitude”, precisely to “not use God nor his people”.

The second is a “penitential attitude”, which David assumes while fleeing from Jerusalem. We read in the passage from the Book of Samuel, that he went to the mountain “weeping” and walked “barefoot and with his head covered”. The Pope said to “think of what it means to climb the mountain barefoot”. And the people who were with him did the same: “He had his head covered, and going up he cried”.

It was “a penitential journey”. Perhaps, the Pope continued, at that time David thought about the many bad things “in his heart”, and about the “many sins he had committed”. And he probably said to himself: “I am not innocent! It is not fair that my son did this to me, but I am not a saint!”. It is in this spirit that David “chooses penance, and cries”. His “ascent up the mountain”, the Pope said, “makes us think about Jesus’ ascent. He too, barefoot and grieving, went up the mountain with his Cross”.

David, therefore, portrays a “penitential attitude”. And when “something happens in our lives, we always seek justice — it is an instinct that we have”. Instead “David does not seek justice. He is realistic. He seeks to save the Ark of God, his people. And he does penance” climbing the mountain. For this reason “he is a great: a great sinner and a great saint”. “How these two things go together”, the Holy Father added, only “God knows. But this is the truth”.

Along his journey the king meets a man named Shimei, who “throws stones” at him and at those who were accompanying him. He was “an enemy” who cursed and “said bad things” to David. Abishai, “one of David’s friends”, proposes to capture and kill the man. “This is a dead dog”, a phrase of the time Abishai uses to show how Shimei was “a bad person”. But David stops him and “instead of choosing revenge in the face of many insults, chooses to rely on God”. We read in the Bible passage: “Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing of me today”. Here is the third attitude: David “relies on the Lord”.

It is indeed “these three attitudes that David has in that time of darkness, in that time of trial, that can help all of us” when we find ourselves in difficult situations. You should not “negotiate our identity”. The Pope emphasized again that we must “accept our penance”, and understand the reasons why we “need to do penance”, and know how to “cry over our mistakes, our sins”.

Ultimately, we must not seek justice with our own hands but we must “rely on God”.

Concluding his homily, Pope Francis invited all to call upon David, who we “venerate as a saint”, and to ask him to teach us how to live “these attitudes in the difficult moments of life”, that we may be people “who love God, love his people and do not use them, who know that they themselves are sinners and do penance, people who are sure of their God and rely on him”.